

HOWARD

The Constitutive Treatment of Thought  
in the Idealism of Thomas Hill Green

Philosophy

A. M.

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THE CONSTITUTIVE TREATMENT OF  
THOUGHT IN THE IDEALISM OF  
THOMAS HILL GREEN

BY

DELTON THOMAS HOWARD

A. B., LAWRENCE COLLEGE, 1910

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THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS

IN

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IN

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

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May 31 1912

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

Delton Thomas Howard  
ENTITLED *The Constitutive Treatment of Thought  
in the Idealism of Thomas Hill Green*

BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF

*Master of Arts.*

*Boyd H. Bode*  
In Charge of Major Work  
*Arthur H. Thrall*  
Head of Department

Recommendation concurred in:

} Committee  
on  
Final Examination



## INTRODUCTION

The notion that thought is a constitutive principle in experience was first clearly formulated by Kant. It was designed by him to meet a particular situation; that is, it was a device for overcoming the irrationality of Hume's world, wherein sensations drifted free and undetermined, at the mercy of blind Chance. Remembering this, we are led to inquire whether the conception still serves a similar purpose? Can constitutive thought have any value, except in relation to such a problem as that supplied by Hume?

These questions are especially pertinent since modern psychology has rejected the atomism of Hume's school. We have come to look upon his sensationalism as artificial and bizarre. We recognize that what is given in experience is not a "manifold of sensations", but an organized situation within which sensations are distinguished according to the work in hand. We are unable to discover sensations apart from such total situations. Curiously enough, idealism has been glad to accept this point of view, and even to make stock of it. Can it consistently do so? Does not the constitutive conception of thought lean entirely for support upon the Humean doctrine of immediacy?



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We remember that Kant proceeded against Hume by accepting his sensational manifold, and adding to it constitutive thought-relations. In the same fashion all idealism assumes a manifold, whose unity must be explained. The invariable function of a transcendental is to hold a manifold in order; it is introduced for the precise reason that sensations cannot unite themselves. In idealistic procedure this manifold may be derived by logical inference from experience, or immediate experience may be defined as fragmentary, incomplete, and insufficient unto itself. But however obtained, we cannot imagine a transcendentalism which does not rest upon such an interpretation of the given. A complete world-order is in the nature of the case an eternally related manifold.

This conception contrasts sharply with what we may call the functional view of experience. For the latter there is no sensational manifold which needs relating. Sensations are abstractions out of the coherent given, and not primitive facts. The world which we immediately know is like a "seamless garment", which requires no added unity; in James' phrase, experience "leans upon itself." It is indeed strange that idealism should approve such



a description of the given, for it contradicts that view of immediacy without which idealism cannot survive.

It is evident, granting the validity of our distinction between the two views, that idealism cannot get along by adhering consistently to either of them. We may well expect to find its exponents shifting ground from one to the other as occasion requires; and it is precisely this charge that has been so vigorously urged by modern writers.

It is our purpose, in considering Green's system, to point out how he is guilty of such inconsistency. The task is not altogether an easy one, for this writer, mindful of the dangers of dualism, fixes attention almost exclusively upon "relations", and talks little of sensations. The manifold is introduced, as it were, surreptitiously. But it is there, and the "unalterable system of related elements" is its outcome. At the same time, he holds a functional view of thought and immediacy, and roves from one to the other, according to the requirements of the moment.

Within human experience thought is functional, and sensations are abstractions. In reality-at-large, we have thought constituting sensations into



a related system of elements. Inevitably, the two come into conflict. This is the typical idealistic dilemma; the finite and the infinite cannot be made to harmonize. As we hope to show, no reconciliation is possible until one of the contradictory conceptions of immediacy is rejected, and the other followed out consistently.



## II.

## KANT AND GREEN.

Green acknowledges his indebtedness to Kant in the many passages wherin he refers to the latter's work. Of the Kantian point of view in general, he speaks as follows : "The difference between what may be broadly called the Kantian view and the ordinary view is this, that whereas according to the latter, it is a world in which thought is no necessary factor that is prior to, and independent of the process by which this or that individual becomes acquainted with it, according to the former it is a world already determined by thought". (Pg. 38)\*

Here we have distinctly stated the doctrine that thought is constitutive, in Kant's sense. But as we have noted, Kant's relations were introduced to hold a manifold in order. We may therefore expect to find a similar manifold in Green's system.

Kant, we remember, begins frankly with a separation between thought and sense. To this Green objects. "This apparent ascription of nature to a two-fold origin- an origin in understanding in respect of its form as a nature, as a single system of experience; an origin elsewhere of the 'matter'

\* All references in this paper are to the "Prologera to Ethics", third edition, published by the Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1890.



which through the action of understanding becomes a nature, cannot but strike us as unsatisfactory" (Pgs. 15-16) This is a peculiar evasion of the real issue, for whether the manifold is "put" together or eternally "held" together, the distinction between sense and thought is not less genuine. Green must have relationless sensations. Let us find them.

"If we take any definition of matter, any account of its necessary qualities, and abstract from it all that consists in a statement of relations between facts in the way of feelings, or between objects that we present to ourselves as sources of feeling, we shall find there is nothing left ". (Pg. 13)

On casual examination this characteristic passage seems to deny a separation between sense and thought, object and understanding. But let us fix our attention upon the word 'matter'. Matter is by definition that which is not thought, and contains no thought. This is precisely what Green means; 'sensation' is used in an equivalent sense. He proceeds : "And we shall try in vain to render an account to ourselves of position or succession, of a body and its identity, except as expressing relations of what is contained in experience, through which alone that content pos-



senses a definite character, and becomes a connected whole." (Pg. 14).

We have then, a manifold, which is obtained by breaking experience up into thought-stuff on the one hand, and matter, or 'content' on the other. There can be no doubt that for Green this distinction is an absolute one. Matter cannot be thought, or thought matter. The manifold is genuine. In fact, he cannot do without it, for by means of this absolute distinction he gets his transcendental. Consider, for instance, the following: "What then, is the source of these relations, as relations of the experienced ;, in other words, of that which exists for consciousness ? What is the principle of unity which renders them possible ?" " We shall still be logically bound to admit that for a man who can know a nature, for whom there is a cosmos of experience, there is a principle which is not natural--." (Pg. 14)

This non-natural principle has no other function than to hold the manifold in order. It is needed because the sensations cannot relate themselves. Matter cannot create consciousness out of itself, nor can it form itself into a rational world so organized that "the relations expressed by our definitions of matter and motion arise therein." The separation between thought and matter is as absolute as could be desired;



and without it there would be no transcendental problem.

The conception of the given is to be found on practically every page of Green's work. One of the most illuminating discussions is to be found in his analysis of the temporal series. "No one and no number of a series of related events can be a consciousness of the series as related. Nor can any product of the series be so either." (Pg. 20-21) Why does he say this? Because the series is a succession of unconscious particles, which cannot relate themselves. Such a manifold could only be held in order by a transcendental. By this type of argument, Green establishes the necessity for a world-consciousness.

So much for the sensations. Now for the relations. Kant made our understanding their source. But for Green this will not do. In a passage already cited, he objects to giving sense and thought a separate origin. It is not to our understanding that the manifold is given, for the experience which we know is already "organized". Remember that he has first described the given as a manifold: as a series, for instance, of material atoms. The two opposed views of immediacy frequently stare at us from the same page.



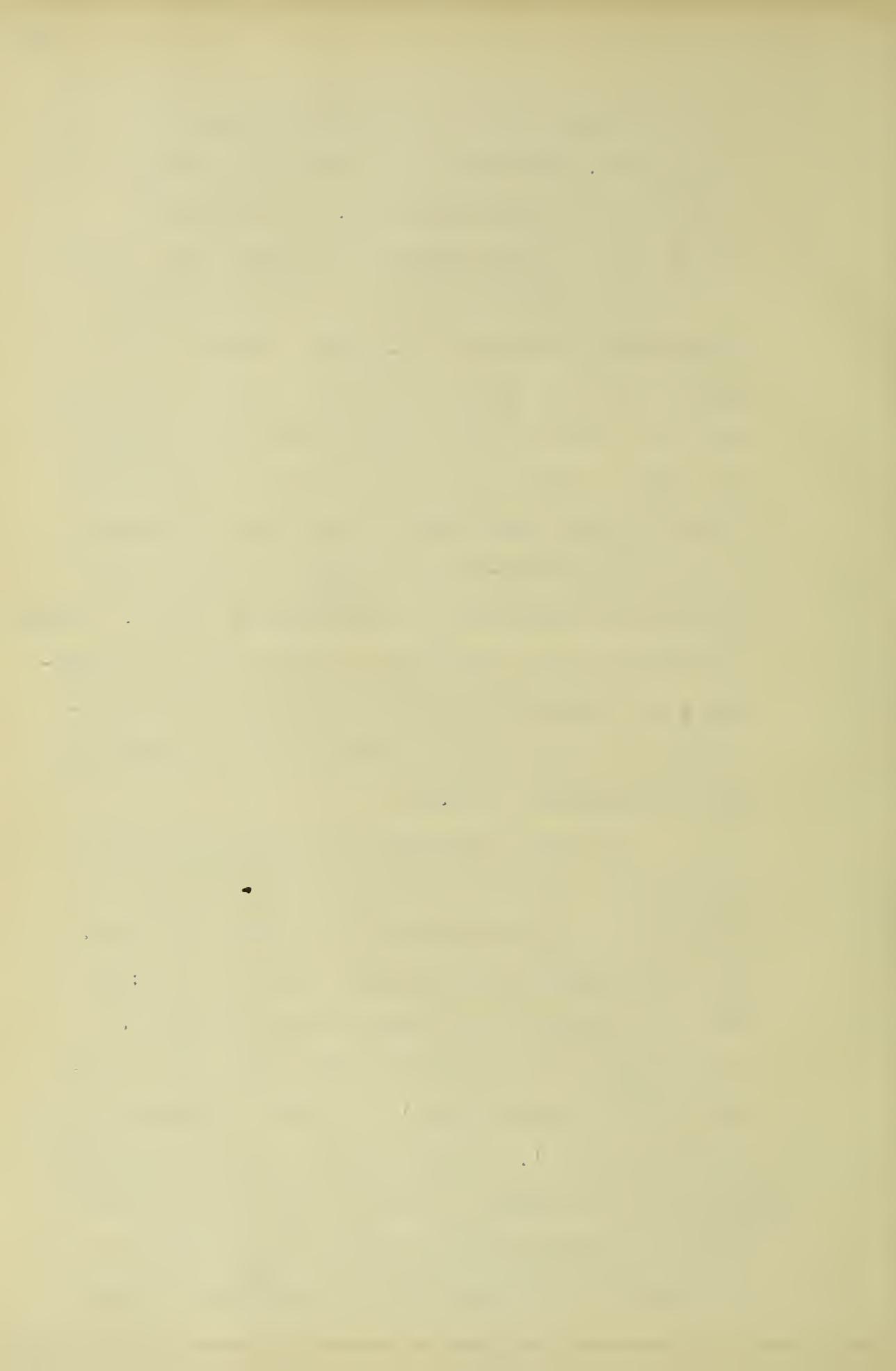
We get the key to the situation by discovering a second separation of sense and thought in his analysis of the human thinking-process. Kant had said that the human understanding "makes nature"; Green says it cannot. "It is true on the one hand as has just been admitted, that in a great part of our lives we feel without thinking, and without any qualification of our feelings by our thought, while yet, on the other hand, we are subjects to whom facts can appear." (Pg. 51). We cannot, therefore, hold things in order, just because we think only occasionally. "It certainly does not depend on any power which we can suppose it rests with our wills to exert, or withhold, whether the sensations shall occur to us in this or that order of succession, with this or that degree of intensity". The task of holding the manifold in order, supplying its relations, is too great for human understanding; an absolute is required.

This is because we have subject sharply distinguished from object, knower from known. The human mind can copy, or recognize reality; it cannot make it for itself, just because its position is over against the given, and not a part of its intimate structure. The thought in the given is the absolute's; the subject has no constitutive ability.



Green, of course, does not hold consistently to this dualism, but there are a number of passages in which it is plainly affirmed. In a quotation already given, Green remarks that thought is "prior to the process with which this or that individual becomes acquainted with it." Again, "Since it is obvious that the facts of the world do not come into being when this or that person becomes acquainted with them, so long as we conceive of no intellectual action but that which this or that person exercises, we necessarily regard the existence or occurrence of the facts as independent of intellectual action." (Pg 56) "In every case the relations by which the given sensation is determined in the apprehension of the percepient, are but a minute part of those by which it is really determined." (Pg.68)

The only conclusion to be drawn from such an analysis is that our finite thought-processes do not and cannot give experience its unity and order. These must be supplied from some single source; a 'unity of apprehension', or world-consciousness. In relation to this the many human minds merely perform 'acts of apprehension', or acts of 'becoming acquainted with'. To say that "we cannot suppose it rests with our wills to exert or withhold- whether sensations shall appear in this or that order of succession", is to deny that our individual thought



exerts any influence whatever upon the world. It can not add or detract one jot. It so stands apart from the flow of events as never to disturb them. If this is not what Green means, what does he mean ?

Let us see where we stand. Green begins with a sensational manifold, secured by making an absolute distinction between sense and thought. He then has the problem of relating the manifold. He introduces a transcendental, non-natural principle to do the work, on the ground that our finite understanding is not equal to the task. This leaves finite intelligence with nothing to do, and introduces a dualism between human thought and its transcendently related given. This second distinction between sense and thought, we shall discover, results in a discrepancy between the finite and the infinite which no logic can overcome.

Such a condition of affairs would not be possible, except by alternation between two distinct conceptions of thought and experience. At one time the given is a manifold, and thought constitutive. At another the given is an organized experience, and thought a temporal process functioning within experience. Let us note more carefully the character of the opposite conceptions, as presented by Green.



THE TWO-FOLD TREATMENT OF THOUGHT  
AND SENSATION.

1. The given is a manifold. As we have seen, Green establishes this by breaking up experience into sense and thought. Let us see how carefully he preserves the distinction. "Yet we cannot ignore sensation. We cannot reduce the world of experience to a web of relations in which nothing is related, as it would be if everything were erased from it which we cannot refer to the action of a combining intelligence. After all our protests against dualism, then, are we not at last left with an unaccountable residuum, an essential element of the real world of experience, which we cannot trace to what we regard as the organizing principle of that world, but which is as necessary to make the world what it is as that principle itself ? " (rg. 45) On the next page he answers this. "Antecedently to any of the formative intellectual processes which he can trace, it would seem that something must have been given for those processes to begin with. This something is taken to be feeling, pure and simple. When all accretions of form, due to the intellectual establishment of relations, have been stripped off, there would seem to remain the mere sensations without which the intellectual activity would have had nothing to deal with or operate upon. These then must be in an absolute sense the matter- the matter excluding all form- of experience ".



In another passage, he says: "It is true, as we have seen, that single things are nothing except as determined by relations, which are the negation of their singleness, but they do not therefore cease to be single things. On the contrary, if they did not survive in their singleness, there could be no relation between them---." (Pg. 31) Again, "It is essential to the comparison, essential, too, to their forming an observable event or succession, that one should not be fused with the other; that the distinct being of each should be maintained." (Pg. 32) This insistence upon the distinction can only be explained by Green's desire to introduce a transcendental, and with it a completely determined, closed world-system.

But we must not forget that this very analysis is the work of a finite intelligence. On his own showing, experience ~~is~~ is organized, and only a logical analysis in human terms, can make it appear as a manifold. Functional thought gives Green his abstract sensations and relations.

2. The given is an organized experience. Green's whole effort is to explain this unity, after he has broken it up by abstraction. But in this mood he no longer insists upon the absolute distinctness of the sensations. "Mere sensation is in truth a phrase which represents no reality; it is the result of a process of abstraction---." Pg. 48) "Mere feelings, then,



as matter unformed by thought, has no place in the world of facts, in the cosmos of possible experience ". (Pg.51). But if there is no unorganized experience; if sensation is a mere abstraction, why do we have to account for the unity of experience ? This conception of the given directly contradicts the first.

It is also interesting to note in connection with this treatment of experience, that thought is constitutive. It is explicitly non-temporal; an ontologically real element which holds between sensations. As temporal thought is needed to give us the manifold by abstraction, so non-temporal thought is required to explain the given as organized. Human thought seems unable to deal with its own abstractions.

3. Thought is constitutive. ""With such a combining agency we are familiar as our intelligence. It is through it that the sensations of the present moment take a character from comparison with the sensations of a moment ago. "(Pg. 31) "The above is an instance of relation between sensations which, as brought into relation by intelligence, become sensible objects or events." (Pg.32) We discover that this combining intelligence is non-temporal. "Within the consciousness that they are related in the way of before and after, there is no before and after -----. They form a process in time. If it were a process in time, it would



not be a consciousness of them as forming a process". (Pg. 59). Furthermore, this consciousness is a single 'unity of apperception'. "The unity of this principle must be correlative to the unity of experience.-----if there can be no such thing as an experience of unrelated objects; then there must be a corresponding singleness in that principle of consciousness which forms the bond of relation between objects." This must be so, since we are not conscious of the whole in one timeless constitutive act. Thought as constitutive, then, is the absolute's, and in this situation Green supposes that our thought is a part of the absolute's.

4. Thought is temporal, and has a function within experience. In this connection we have two distinct conceptions to deal with. (a) Human thought has no constitutive ability, but merely apprehends, and cannot work any change upon the given. We had already noted that the introduction of the absolute leaves human thought with no work to do. "Hence it is only the successive changes in our apprehensive attitudes towards/ the objects of our experience and knowledge that are commonly put to the account of consciousness..."(Pg.62) "The attainment of knowledge, again, as an occurrence in the individual's history, a transition from one state of knowledge to another,



may be properly called a phenomenon, but not so the consciousness of relations as related facts." In other words, our apprehension is a phenomenal process, determined by the world-consciousness, but not of itself able to do more than passively recognize.

(b) Knowing is both temporal, and has work to do. It has the imposing task of distinguishing the real from the unreal, appearance from reality. It determines truth and error. Here we have the genuinely functional view of thought. It is the kind of thinking that enables us to distinguish between sense and thought; it is the judgment process for which alone such distinctions have value. Concerning the general character of functional thought we shall have more to say later, in the way of making its implications clearer. At present let us content ourselves with as sharp a distinction as possible between the two views.

The non-natural, constitutive principle, which preserves the distinctions of our thinking process when we no longer think, and makes them possible for our thinking, must indeed be 'not-natural'; not only in the sense that it cannot arise out of matter, but in the further sense that it performs a function radically different from anything our own thought, as temporal, can furnish. It does precisely the



things that the consciousness we know cannot do, and this is the very reason why it is introduced. Let us briefly contrast the two, in regard to their most essential characters. We can say concerning human thinking, and to this Green would agree: 1. It is a temporal process. 2. It is occasional. 3. It gets its cue from experience. 4. It involves some comparison with other than the given data. 5. It is particular, dealing with some one fact which it seeks to explain. But the world-consciousness, as constitutive, has opposite characters: 1. Its thinking is non-temporal, being the condition of time itself. 2. It is eternal, and omnipresent in reality, as the knower of all its relations. 3. It receives no cue, and needs no cue for its operations, since it is eternally complete. 4. It involves no act of comparison, since all its comparisons are already made. 5. It is not occupied with single facts, but with all reality in equal degree.

These two conceptions are so opposed to one another, that they permit of no substitution, and that one could never possibly perform the functions of the other. They are to each other as mind is to matter. In fact, this is at bottom the precise distinction between them. On the one hand, the absolute-ness, the unalterableness of quantity and quality which physicists ascribe to matter, and on the other



the motion and flow and incessant activity that we associate with mind. The static and the changing seem eternally opposed. How can one be the other ? The infinite's thought must remain a mystery to us. Vaguely we represent it to ourselves as a relating eternally complete; an order of ontological realities; the framework in a world-edifice. We can compare it only with those physical and mechanical relations that we perceive in nature. But we never confuse such structure with consciousness; it is for us the negation of mind. Does it seem proper to call such a being a consciousness ?

We are prepared to see that both the conceptions of the given as a manifold, and of thought as constitutive, are artificial and contradictory of the direct evidence ~~of~~ experience, which is the final court of appeal. Green's modus operandi with these abstractions is somewhat as follows: He analyses experience, the unified given, and by a process of abstraction breaks it up into a manifold. Taking these elements to be real, even though they are later described as 'mere abstractions', he tries to unite them into an experience once more. Functional thought, which had distinguished the sensations, cannot deal with the abstractions, so he at once concludes to an a priori constitutive thought. This thought, we have



also seen, is an abstraction to which no experienced thought conforms. Having got the manifold related, he declares that sense and thought are only relative terms, which cannot exist apart, and thus denies his own starting point. Moreover, in this situation he leaves temporal thought with no occupation. All relating is the work of the transcendental absolute, which determines human thought-processes as it does of her events. This would make the determination of truth and error already complete. But this will not do for it contradicts the facts of experience; human consciousness finds that truth and error are yet to be determined. He therefore lets human consciousness do this work, in which role it usurps prerogatives which first belonged to the absolute. Only by shifting from one point of view to the other, in this fashion, is a transcendental program possible.

But a consistent adherence to one or the other must be demanded. We know thought as temporal, or as non-temporal; sensations as mere abstractions, or as absolute entities; relations as eternal meanings, completed before we discover them, or as organic processes from fact to fact through the empirical 'fundamentum'. Which shall we choose?

Rigid adherence to the constitutive view gives us an eternally related manifold, an absolute system of related elements, within which no incompleteness



can exist. But experience is always growing; this is the surest fact we know. In short, what we know immediately, experience, is just what the absolute system is not. A contrast of the two in more particular detail will be profitable. Can experience and reality-at-large be reconciled? And if we admit that for experience the given is organized, and thought able to work change, must we not do away with <sup>such</sup> conceptions as come into conflict with these primary facts? In other words, is the constitutive view able to maintain itself when consistently carried out?



THE FINITE AND THE  
INFINITE

We have so far seen that Green presents his reader with two different conceptions of thought and immediacy, which contradict one another at every conceivable point. We have inquired whether there is any possibility of reconciling the two; whether finite thought and experience can be a part of that "single and unalterable system" which is the "real" universe.

It is interesting to note in this connection that Green explicitly admits our consciousness to have a double aspect. We have not, he insists, two consciousnesses, but the "one indivisible reality of our consciousness cannot be comprehended under a single conception." (Pg. 73) They must, then, be comprehended under two conceptions. On the one hand the absolute, constitutive thought, which is non-temporal, and on the other the finite, functional, temporal thought upon which we exclusively depend for our information. But is not this an admission that the two definitions of thought are so opposed as to defy all attempts to bring them under one conception? Is it not a naive confession of Green's inability to get along with them except by alternating from one to the other as emergency demands?

We noted in our first section that Green, after separating experience into sense and thought by abstraction, proceeds to a second separation between



the unified given and human thought. It is this second separation with which we are now confronted. It works out into an inevitable dualism between the finite thinker with his unique experience, and the constituted reality "beyond". Let us remind ourselves once more of the completeness of this separation.

1. Constitutive thought, that of the world-consciousness, is first of all that which holds the given in order. It unites sensations into an orderly experience, so that "the relations expressed by our definitions of matter and motion arise therein". (Pg.14). But it is not only this. It must close up the gap between our thought on the one hand, and the experience which it knows on the other. Thus Green says that the principle of unity is "something which ~~which~~ as the source of a connected experience renders both the nature that we know and our knowledge of it possible". (Pg.14) At a later point he makes an even more precise statement. "And when the reading is over, the consciousness that the sentence has a meaning has become a consciousness of what in particular the meaning is; a consciousness in which the successive results of the mental operations involved in the reading are held together without succession, as a connected whole". (Pg.76)

In such a situation the absolute's thought con-



stitutes our mental operations. We might expect this, because our thinking is temporal, and that of the infinite the condition of time. Put in these circumstances our thought is data for the infinite to constitute. The infinite thought cannot therefore enter into or be the data, without losing its character as constitutive. The dualism, on these grounds, is completely established, and there remains no possibility of showing that one "is" the other.

2. "Our knowledge" of nature on the one hand, and nature as it "Really" is on the other, are sharply distinguished from one another. Greer admits in many passages that what we take an object to be, our "opinion" of it, is not at all what it is in its reality. "The illusive appearance, as opposed to the reality, of any event, is what the event really is not; but at the same time it is really something. It is real, not indeed with the particular reality which the subject of the illusion ascribes to it, but with a reality which a superior intelligence might understand". (Pg. 26).

Now what does this mean if not that the event or object is one thing for the infinite, and another for us? Taking the situation quite literally, the infinite, in order to be our consciousness, must:



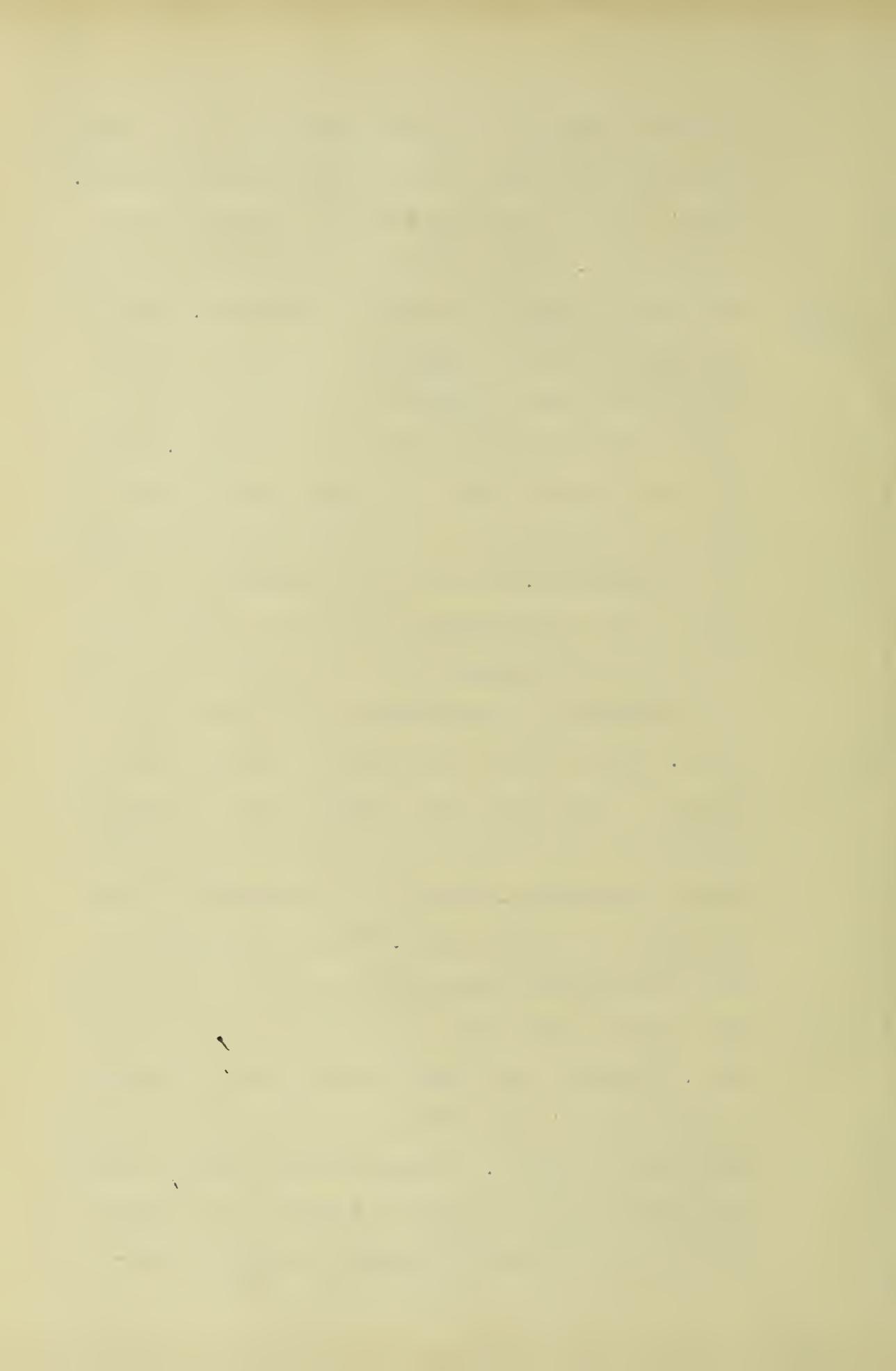
1. Know and not know the object in its full reality at the same time. 2. Must have illusions and problems to puzzle over, while at the same time its problems are all solved, and its knowledge so complete that illusion is impossible. We might go on with a long list of the contradictory things the absolute would have to do to hold experience within itself, but one example is as good as a dozen. There is no consciousness that could know our experience and know everything there is to know at the same time. In other words, finite thought and infinite thought cannot belong to the same individual.

3. The most interesting phase of the situation, and one which cannot be too strongly insisted upon, is that constitutive thought, and its absolute order of reality, is something altogether mysterious and incomprehensible from our human point of view. An appeal to introspection fails to give us any cue to a consciousness which is unalterable in its determinations, for the only consciousness that we know and can represent to ourselves is dynamic, progressive, working changes in the world through its activities. a consciousness which changes nothing, whose judgments make no differences to our world, is, as Dewey would remark, a "dark saying".

The same may be said for that "single and un-



alterable system of relations" which is the infinite manifold constituted by the infinite consciousness. Green's effort to describe this in human terms is interesting. At one time he conceives that we know it directly, as if by a kind of intuition. Thus he says that in making judgments of truth and error, we contrast "each experience as it occurs with a single and unalterable system of relations." This would seem to mean that as finite beings we actually have power to grasp the universe in one single act of comprehension. But this is contradicted, not only by the many passages in which he explicitly admits our limitations, but by the fashion in which he illustrates our determinations of truth and error. Here we find that we draw a contrast, not between a given fact and a "single and unalterable system", but we refer the fact to other particular finite experiences. Thus, in his discussion of the position of the hill, (Pg. 27), he plainly says that we contrast yesterday's appearance of the hill with today's, in order to correct our first impression. Similarly, the engine driver, (Pg. 16) 'sees a signal wrong', and still the seeing was a fact; it had its own reality. It remained this reality until by determining the relations "between the present state of the latter and certain determining con-



ditions ----as full and definite, with sufficient inquiry and opportunity, as ascertainable, as in any case of normal vision", he corrects his first impression. It is by enquiry into other experiential facts that the correction is made, and the signal becomes another kind of fact than it was. We find it shown in illustration of the judgment process how the particular facts are contrasted with the absolute system. The reason, beyond doubt, is that the latter, as possible experience, is ruled out by every consideration, logical and psychological, that enters into the problem.

It is in vain, then, that we seek to represent to ourselves the "single and unalterable system of related elements" which Green conceives reality to be. This is a good and sufficient reason for rejecting it; for as unmeaning and incomprehensible, it has no value and therefore no validity as a hypothesis. A world so unrelated to our own as to be forever beyond our vision might as well be non-existent.

4. A consistent carrying out of the functional view which Green introduces at various points, and especially in the discussion of truth just mentioned, renders the opposite conception impossible. There is not merely a separation between the

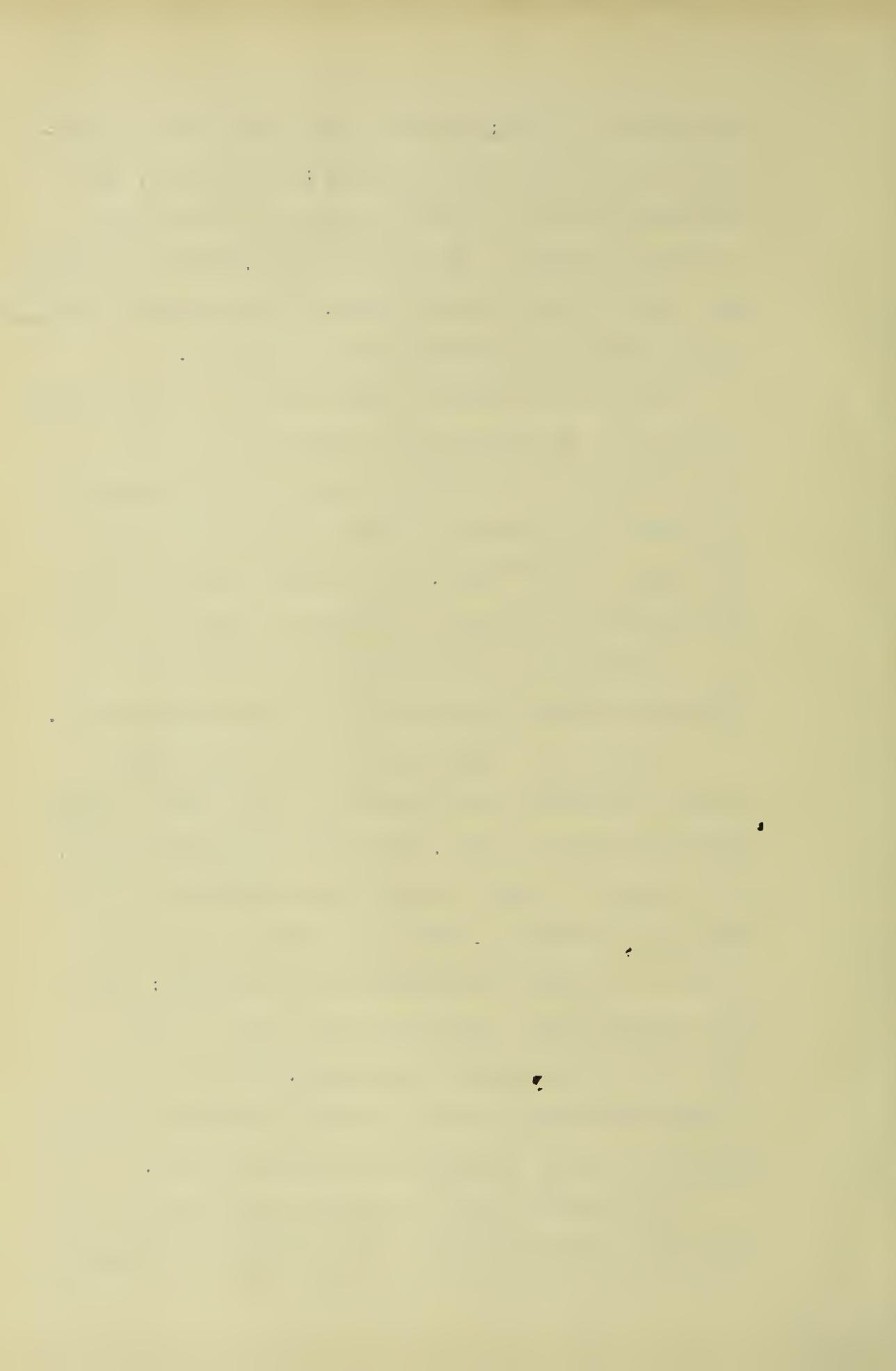


two points of view; the two conceptions of consciousness. They cannot exist together; one must go. The functional kind of thought, however, is that which we know in terms of experience itself. Of its validity and value we can have no doubt. Let us see how, carried out, it makes the contrary view impossible.

We find that Green's last resource, in his attempt to make the absolute system intelligible, is to such arguments as this: "We regard it" (Intellectual progress) "as a progress toward the attainment of knowledge or true ideas. But we cannot suppose that the relations of facts or objects in consciousness ----- first comes into being when we attain that knowledge". "What it was really, it was unalterably".

He appeals to experience to show that after making a discovery, we suppose our new object to have been there all the time. The future is already made; any progress of ours is merely one of discovery of that prepared future. This means that the results of our own thought-processes must be ignored; that the changes which they bring about must be read back into the antecedent situation. But will such a conception work? Let us see what functional thought requires for its operation in the way of data.

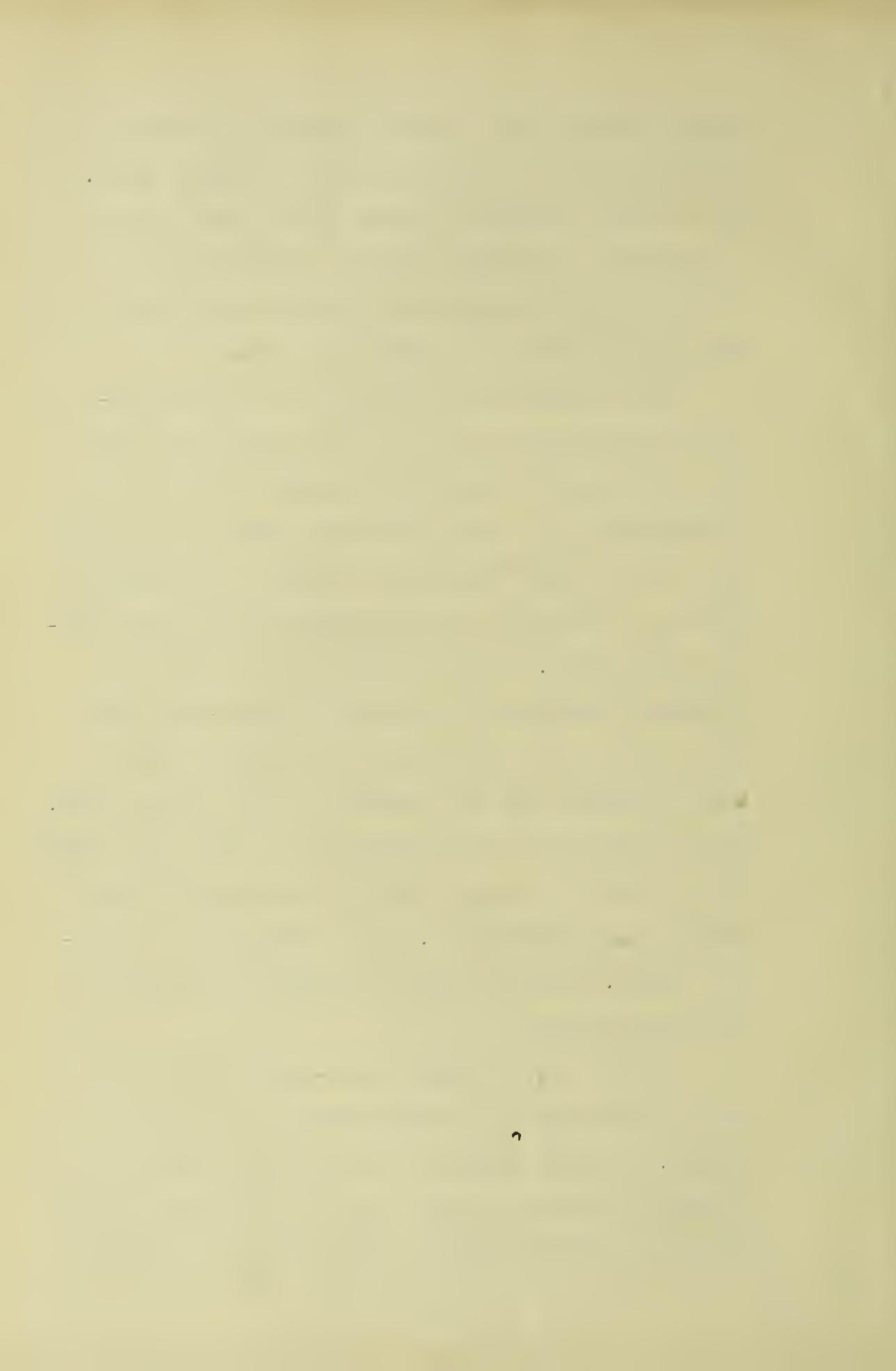
Our attention must now center more directly upon those facts which for our experience, as Green



admits, "grow", and seem not to have the unalterableness which he conceives them to "really" have. What is the character of these facts, which serve as datum for our finite thought ? And under what conditions do they lead us to believe that they were always what we now find them to be ?

Let us examine the content's of a single moment's experience, and see what they are like. What does this moment's experience contain ? As I write this paper in my own little room, more or less shut off from the world without, I am none the less conscious of the bustle and hum and clatter of the teeming life beyond. I hear the whistle and rush of a distant locomotive, the sound of a foot-ball and mens' voices, the clattering of a wagon on the brick pavement, and the barking of dogs near and far. Through the heavy lace curtains I see dimly the sunlit street with its houses, and the figures of men and autos passing to and fro. Such a situation is familiar enough. But how shall we explain its order, coherence and unity ?

I might say concerning each of the noises and sights that each of them represents or means its object. I hear a whistle, and infer that there is a locomotive yonder; I hear a noise like barking, and judge that it represents a dog ; I see a dim figure



passing the window, and "know" that it is a man. But this is obviously not what I do. There is no distinction between noise and train, or bark and dog. There are simple facts, and nothing more. No judgment or thought process is concerned with them. They have no "meaning". I am not conscious of them as related to anything. At first hand, then, and this is testimony furnished easily to us all, we find evidence to contradict Green's fundamental assumption. Every fact is not a fact for a "knower". We have troubles enough without thinking about every object that comes into experience; and objects serve us better when we are not compelled to worry about them.

But we may deal with these facts in thought. We can ask what the noise means. As a general statement it is true that we can make any fact the object of a judgment. But we cannot make all facts the object of judgement at any one time. That is equally clear. But when do facts become objects for judgement? When do they have meaning, and when are they simple facts?

The obvious answer is that we think about things when they puzzle us. But they do not present themselves as problems arbitrarily. It is always in relation to some purpose, or activity, that we



are puzzled. The purpose may not be a well-defined one; we may be scarcely conscious or not at all conscious of it as purpose; but we will find that our interpretations are always in motor terms, and have to do with our activities. If some men think more than others it is because they have more ambition, more purposes; more things to do or that they expect to do.

Green speaks of human consciousness as related to the organism. It is through the organism that the eternal consciousness reproduces itself in us. But let us forego the consideration of the eternal purpose which is beyond our ken, and agree with Green that consciousness as we know it is indeed related to the organism and its activities. In such a familiar situation we have described, it is easily seen, we adjust ourselves easily and habitually to our environment. The noises and sights in our illustration are familiar, and we adapt ourselves to them without jar or effort. These habitual adjustments, have of course, been acquired. But so far as their status in consciousness is concerned, they play the same role as instinctive ones.

However, when an object puzzles us, it is because we are not able to adjust to it smoothly. What is it?—means, What shall I do about it? In general,



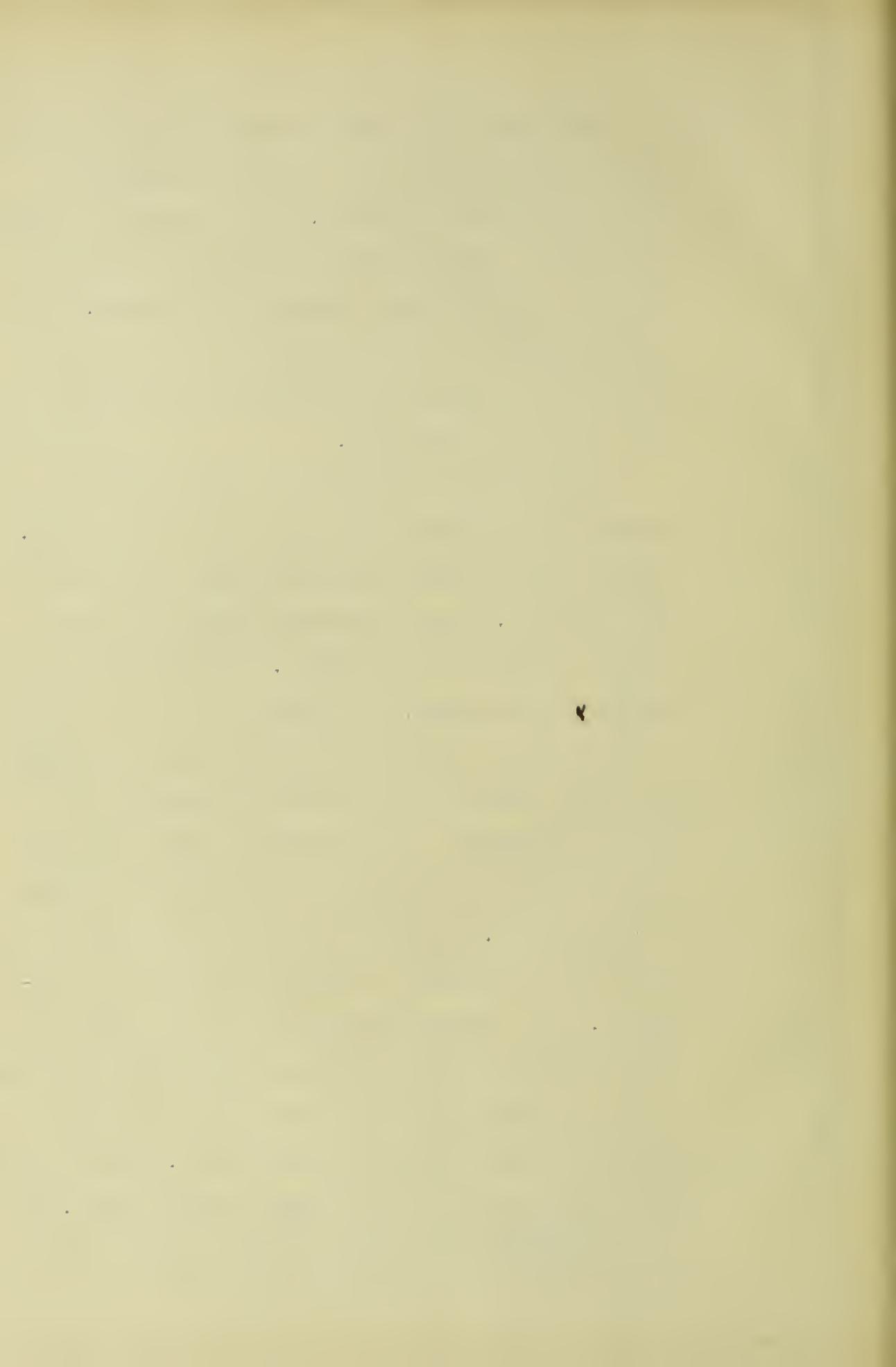
then, facts become objects for thought when they are strange or problematic with reference to some purpose. And this always means that smooth and easy adjustment is inhibited. As when the object is familiar, adjustment is achieved before thought can intervene, so when the object is strange it demands thought as the means to adjustment. When such a process is ended, the object is familiar, and we can deal with it habitually, without recourse to thinking. In this connection we must not lose sight of the organic character of the total situation. The adjustment does not cause the object to change, any more than the object causes the adjustment. They are co-ordinate aspects of one process.

We are now prepared to see that "meaning" is correlated with this process of adjustment. Meaning is not a something that stands between objects, but a questioning attitude; not an 'ontological reality', but the becoming situation psychologically described. We have observed that the process of thinking is one whereby a fact becomes other than it was. Now the essential part of this otherness is in terms of the readjustment that has been made. We describe an object most easily when we tell what can be done with it, which would seem to indicate that meaning has its greatest significance in motor terms.



But in any case, and we need not decide here finally what meaning shall precisely designate, it is not anything definite. If we identify it with the personal attitude, the latter is one of hesitation, of indirection, lacking definiteness. If it be identified with the object in its becoming, the latter is likewise undetermined in regard to its questioned character.

The ideational features of such a becoming process are sometimes identified with the meaning. We form various hypotheses concerning the object and test them. These hypotheses might be called ideas, but this is misleading. For the thing tested is always the object. Is it this, or that? Can I do this or that with it? Is it like this or that in certain respects? We need not enter into a detailed analysis of the thinking process. It does indeed involve a reference of the fact in question to other facts. But for our purposes this simply means that our datum is always presented in a situation. It is always present, not as one completely distinguishable fact, but as an object among objects. And the process whereby it becomes more, is also a process which changes its associates. Within this total process there are no merely mental ideas. The meaning still concerns our relation to the object,



which in the total becoming reveals not only its own change, but acts and reacts with those hypothetical ideas which are, after all, other facts, upon which, as James might say, the thinking process leans.

The gist of this discussion, which so far is merely borrowed from contemporary psychology, is to show that "knowing" is a special act, arising under special conditions, and having a definite function to serve.

Within this process we are able to distinguish between datum and meaning, sense and thought. But with the termination of the process the distinction ends. Meaning and datum flow back into the organic unity of perception; for human experience they cease to exist. When the adjustment is made, and purpose no longer inhibited, there is no need for thought and its distinctions. We have arrived at that satisfactory stage of experience, so far as the present situation is concerned, where there is no jar of mal-adjustment, or turmoil of conflicting impulses, but a smooth and easy flow of the stream, which is the end and ambition of all thinking. Why say, then, that the familiar object about which we do not trouble ourselves, is constituted by relations or meanings? If it has meaning, it is not for us. And what reason to believe that it has for any-



body?

This brings us directly to a question not yet answered. What underlies Green's assurance that "What it was really, it was unalterably"? This kind of belief, of course, is ingrained in our very thought and language by centuries of teaching which made it appear plausible. But for philosophy tradition is never sacred. We must keep our minds free of prejudice.

First of all, then, we would call fresh attention to the manner in which Green supposes the distinction between thought and sense to persist after the thinking process is ended. He forgets that such distinctions are purely arbitrary. All of our classifications, and the things that we designate by names are real, in so far as they serve our purposes. But only as purposive are they of value. We may take any single object, as a chair, which we have distinguished and given a name, and discover that the distinction can never be absolute. For the object interpenetrates with the air and its environment; it is a member of a larger situation in relation to which it is organically united. We often find ourselves paying attention, not to the furniture in a room, but to the spaces between the objects. We can at will cut out and distinguish the features of the situation with which we



wish to deal for the purposes in hand, just as we can count 100 in tens, fives, or ones; and in this arbitrary manner we deal with all facts. But to what extent are such distinctions absolute? Not at all; they are purely relative. As the human body is one thing for the physician, another for the artist, and still another for the lion, so is all reality what we take it to be; but never anything absolute in itself. For the thinking process, for the attainment of ends, such distinctions have value, but within the satisfactory experience that thought seeks to establish, they would be an annoyance. Familiar objects, as distinctions within experience, do indeed have a relative permanence, as meeting our common purposes and needs. Let them cease to have value in relation to our activities, and they too would go.

This is not to say that the results of thought are not genuine. We have spoken of the process as one of becoming, and such it is indeed. It changes the very character of our world. But is this new character the result of the persisting thought-distinctions? Surely not. The setting off of qualities and attributes, and "parts for the whole", which such a process involves, would be fatal to the unity of reality did it persist. It is only when these



qualities and meanings have recombined into a primeval unity that the character of the object is definitely changed. The new character is not a compound, or experienced as such, but just that kind of perceptual unity in which thought's distinctions cease to exist. To just the extent, in any situation, that we pay thoughtful attention to our object, is it distinct; and as we attend from it to some other object, it resolves itself into the total situation which is total because of lack of detailed distinction within it.

To take these distinctions as absolute is to baffle thought in its operations. The physicist, however much he may persist in the notion that matter is composed of atoms, still deals with it in his practical experiments as a unified mass without regard to its composition. He must do so in order to get along with it; how could he study specific gravity, which requires dealing-in-the-mass, if he were constantly compelled to think his substance as atomic? He must not make the mistake, then, of considering either absolute.

But it is precisely this kind of a distinction that Green preserves as absolute, when he treats relations and facts as constantly existing. Here we arrive at mechanism. He gives us a structural



universe within which sensations and relations persist; but as they do not persist for finite experience, but arise only on occasion, he is compelled to say what principle keeps them distinct when not thought about by us. Pragmatism, as we have seen, describes the unity in terms of perception, of experience itself. Idealism must go beyond experience, and posit an absolute. It appears as an artificial solution of an artificial problem.

The conclusion to which we are inevitably forced is that functional thought, by reason of its requirements, and the methods and results of its operation, cannot get along with a world which is eternally fixed. Since the whole effect of constitutive thought, consistently carried out, would be to render functional thought inoperative, we must cast the former aside as an untenable hypothesis. Moreover, the functional view seems to require no assistance from an extra-experiential source. It furnishes of itself a consistent description of reality, as a constant becoming. Aside from the consideration that this conception is more consistent with the facts of life than its opposite, it has as much and perhaps more value from an ethical and moral point of view. In the long run, no doubt, this is the most important of all considerations. It must prove itself as a practical working hypothesis.



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